

LIVING IN THE PAST

VICTORIAN CHILDREN AT WORK

Learning outcome: We are learning to understand what life was like for children working during the Victorian era.

Assessment criteria:

As an outcome produce a short piece of drama or role play showing what it would have been like to work as a child during the Victorian era. Perhaps you were a scavenger in the mills or a child working on a farm.

National Curriculum links: History:

Key stage 1

The National Curriculum for history aims to ensure that all pupils:

- know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day: how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world.

Pupils should be taught about:

- events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally [for example, the Great Fire Of London, the first aeroplane flight or events commemorated through festivals or anniversaries].
- the lives of significant individuals in the past who have contributed to national and international achievements. Some should be used to compare aspects of life in different periods [for example, Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, Christopher Columbus and Neil Armstrong, William Caxton and Tim Berners-Lee, Pieter Bruegel the Elder and LS Lowry, Rosa Parks and Emily Davison, Mary Seacole and/or Florence Nightingale and Edith Cavell].
- significant historical events, people and places in their own locality.

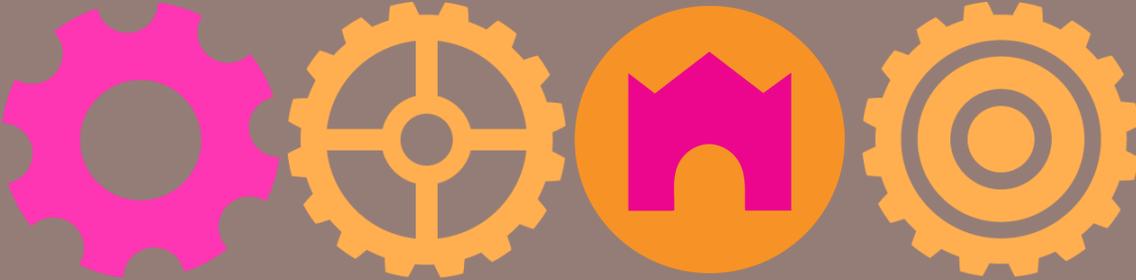
Key stage 2

A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.

Examples (non-statutory)

- the changing power of monarchs using case studies such as John, Anne and Victoria.
- A significant turning point in British history, for example, the first railways or the Battle of Britain.





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Film synopsis:

This film focuses on what it was like for children working during Queen Victoria's reign. First you are introduced to a young boy called Charlie who works in a local coal mine but dreams of being like his cousin William working on a farm one day. Then you will meet Florence who has worked all her life! First working from home alongside her mother, then at the local cotton mill, before having the chance to work for Mr and Mrs Walker at their beautiful posh house in the countryside.

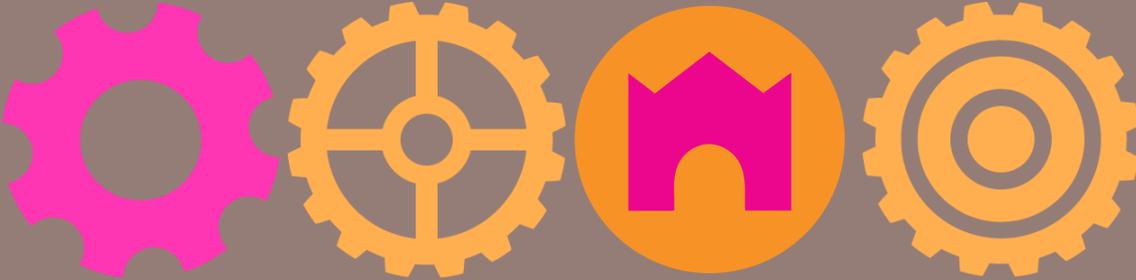
You can watch the film in full or break into two, focusing on Charlie first and then Florence. Discuss and ask questions.

Resources needed: [Living in the Past. Victorian Children at Work. Film, overview.pdf.](#) and accompanying [Q&A.](#) Paper and pencil.

Suggested discussion questions: 'What was it like for Florence working in the mill?' 'Do you think it is fair that children had to work?' 'What was it like for working children living in Victorian Britain?' 'What would it be like to have to crawl inside moving machinery in a mill?' 'How does Florence feel about working at Mr and Mrs Walker's country house?'

- **Activity:** Create a small piece of drama or role play linked to working during Victorian times, perhaps you could work in small groups and all take on a different role, describing your working conditions. Describe how long your working day was? What is your job? Were there any dangers where you work? Try and give as much detail as possible. You will need to plan what you are going to act out, you should produce a basic script, if you want you can use Florence's script for inspiration.
- **Alternative activity:** Make a list or complete a table showing the differences between life as a child today and the life of a child working during Victorian times. Try and use as much detail as possible.
- **Proof read and read aloud** with appropriate intonation to make the meaning clear.





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Additional resource: Florence's script:

My name is Florence and I am 15 years old. I have worked all my life; as a young girl I used to help Mother round the house with the chores, and as soon as I turned 5 I was sent to work in the cotton mills. The mill was a hot, noisy and terrifying place to work. Each floor of the mill had rows of machines called mules which spin the cotton. The mules were hammering and banging, clunking and clattering, hour after hour, day in, day out, on and on and on. After years of working there, many workers go deaf... some even go crazy from the constant noise.

I was a scavenger. This was the worst job of all. My job was to keep the machinery clean and free of loose threads. When cotton fell to the floor I had to crawl on my hands and knees under the machinery and collect it. They didn't stop the machines though; the adults got paid more the more thread they produced, so if they stopped the machines they would lose money. You had to keep your wits about you. If you stopped concentrating or mis-timed grabbing a piece of cotton you could easily get trapped in the machinery. Many children had fingers chopped off, or their hands crushed. Girls with long hair risked getting it tangled up in the machines and ripped from their heads. It happened more than you would like to believe.

I was luckier than most; my Dad worked hard for our family, and for that I am VERY grateful. He earned enough money so that once the rent and food and coal for the fire were paid for, there was a bit of money left over; just enough to send me to school so that I could learn to read and write a little, and to sew. This gave me a way out of the mills, a chance that many girls never get.

When I was 12 years old I got a job as a maid working for Mr and Mrs Walker. They've got a beautiful posh house in the countryside. I start my work at 5 o'clock in the morning and finish at 9 o'clock at night; that's 16 hours every day. Well, not on Sundays. Now if I still worked in the mill, or if I worked in a shop or a factory I would have Sundays off. Sunday's the Lord's day you see; a day of rest. But you can't rest when you are a servant for a family like the Walkers. They still need their meals preparing. Beds still need making, floors still need scrubbing, so there's no day off for me. We do get a couple of hours off to visit church though, which is a nice break, though we have to work even harder to get all our chores done once church is over. Mr and Mrs Walker have a bell on the wall in every room. When they want something they press the button, the bell rings in the kitchen and we have to go running. (Footage of bell ringing in servants' quarters?)

The work is hard, and at the end of the day my hands are chapped and sore from being in the bleach and water, washing the clothes and scrubbing the floors, but I am better off than I was. One day I hope to be Mrs Walker's ladies' maid. I would help her to wash and dress, make her hair look nice and even travel with her to dinners and dances at other stately homes. I wouldn't have to have the housekeeper shouting orders at me any more: I would take my orders directly from Mrs Walker. And if I was REALLY lucky, she might give me some of her old cast off dresses.

